DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 380 524 UD 030 334

AUTHOR	Connors, Lori J.; Epstein, Joyce L.
TITLE	Taking Stock. Views of Teachers, Parents, and Students on School, Family, and Community Partnerships in High Schools. Report No. 25.
INSTITUTION	Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning.; Johns Hopkins Univ., Baltimore, Md.
SPONS AGENCY	Lilly Endowment, Inc., Indianapolis, Ind.; Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	Aug 94
CONTRACT	R117Q00031
NOTE	38p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning, Johns Hopkins University, 3505 North Charles St., Baltimore, MD 21218.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Educational Practices; High Schools; *High School Students; Information Dissemination; Parent Attitudes; Parent Participation; *Parents; Parent School Relationship; *Partnerships in Education; *Secondary School Teachers; *Student Attitudes; Student Participation; Surveys; *Teacher Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS	*Maryland

ABSTRACT

This report summarizes the preliminary results from surveys of teachers, parents, and students in six Maryland high schools about their attitudes toward and needs for school, family, and community partnerships. Data from 420 families indicate that they feel welcome at their teens' high schools, but a large majority want to be more involved and to receive better information about how to help their teens. Data from over 1,300 students illustrate the variation in teens' attitudes and competencies, and point to an important role for students in school and family partnerships. Students want to be more involved, and over half want their parents more involved with their schools. Data from 150 teachers show that just about all believe that involvement is important, but two-thirds say they need more training to know how to involve families. These and other results are discussed to show how the schools involved in the High School and Family Partnerships Project used their survey results to plan and implement new practices to inform and involve families. Suggestions are made to help other high schools apply the results of this study to their own efforts to develop or strengthen school, family, and community partnerships. (Contains 29 references.) (SLD)

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CENTER ON FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES, SCHOOLS & CHILDREN'S LEARNING

TAKING STOCK

Views of Teachers, Parents, and Students on School, Family, and Community Partnerships in High Schools

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Lori J. Connors
Joyce L. Epstein

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Report No. 25 / August 1994

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Published by the Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning. This work has been supported by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education (R117Q00031) and by a grant from the Lilly Endowment. The opinions expressed are the authors' and do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the supporting organizations.

CENTER ON FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES, SCHOOLS & CHILDREN'S LEARNING

The nation's schools must do more to improve the education of all children, but schools cannot do this alone. More will be accomplished if families and communities work with children, with each other, and with schools to promote successful students.

The mission of this Center is to conduct research, evaluations, policy analyses, and dissemination to produce new and useful knowledge about how families, schools, and communities influence student motivation, learning, and development. A second important goal is to improve the connections between and among these major social institutions.

Two research programs guide the Center's work: the Program on the Early Years of Childhood, covering children aged 0-10 through the elementary grades; and the Program on the Years of Early and Late Adolescence, covering youngsters aged 11-19 through the middle and high school grades.

Research on family, school, and community connections must be conducted to understand more about all children and all families, not just those who are economically and educationally advantaged or already connected to school and community resources. The Center's projects pay particular attention to the diversity of family cultures and backgrounds and to the diversity in family, school, and community practices that support families in helping children succeed across the years of childhood and adolescence. Projects also examine policies at the federal, state, and local levels that produce effective partnerships.

A third program of Institutional Activities includes a wide range of dissemination projects to extend the Center's national leadership. The Center's work will yield new information, practices, and policies to promote partnerships among families, communities, and schools to benefit children's learning.

Abstract

This report summarizes the preliminary results from surveys of teachers, parents, and students in six Maryland high schools about their attitudes toward and needs for school, family, and community partnerships.

Data from families indicate that they feel welcome at their teens' high schools, but a large majority (80%) want to be more involved. Most want better information about *how* to help their teens at home and with homework. Data from students illustrate the variation in teens' attitudes and competencies, and point to an important role for students in school and family partnerships. Students want to be more involved in their own schools and education, from participating in parent-teacher conferences to serving on committees. Over half want their parents more involved as knowledgeable partners with their schools. Data from teachers show that just about all teachers believe that involvement is important, but two thirds say they need more training to know *how* to involve families.

These and other results are discussed to show how the schools involved in the High School and Family Partnerships Project used their survey results to plan and implement new practices to inform and involve families. Suggestions are made to help other high schools apply the results of this study to their own efforts to develop or strengthen school, family, and community partnerships.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to thank the Action Team Leaders from each of the schools for their participation in and contributions to the development and administration of the survey. They are:

Chesapeake High School -- Nikki Coffman, Fred Prumo
Douglass High School -- Yvonne Thornton, Shirley Hill
Edgewood High School -- Dave Myers, Claudia Sconion
Havre de Grace High School -- Kathryn Hepler, Carolyn Kustanbauter, Robin Walker
Kenwood High School -- Vicki Bender, Sharon Shultz
Patterson High School -- Rose Douglas, Olivia Williams

We also thank the parents, students, teachers, and administrators who completed the survey, and other state and local administrators who assisted the project.

The authors share equal responsibility for this report, and either may contacted for more information.

Introduction

Families do not stop caring for their children or valuing education when their teens enter high school. However, in order to successfully negotiate with and involve themselves in the high schools their teens attend, parents need more self-confidence and information-gathering skills than they did when their children were younger (Epstein, 1992; Useem, 1990). Studies have shown that parent involvement declines dramatically as students move from the elementary grades through middle and senior high school (Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Epstein, 1986, 1992; Stevenson & Baker, 1987). The increasingly complex structure of high schools -- with more teachers, larger and more distant school buildings, and a more varied curriculum -- as well as the lack of encouragement for involvement given to parents by secondary schools contribute to the decline (Brian, 1994; Clark, 1988; Epstein & Dauber, 1991).

Most studies show that parents try to remain involved at home, even though few are active at the school (Clark, 1983; Muller, 1991; Newsweek & National PTA, 1993). This is true in Catholic schools as well as in public high schools. Bauch (1988) studied five inner-city Catholic high schools and reported that fewer than one third of the parents talked with a teacher more than twice a year. In these schools, between 6% and 30% of the parents *never* talked with a teacher. Although more parents tried to remain involved at home, only one third were considered active in three or more types of involvement such as monitoring homework at home, attending a meeting, and volunteering or serving on a decision-making committee.

Dornbusch & Ritter (1988) found that contact between parents and high school teachers was infrequent. Over 60% of the teachers reported contacting almost none or a few parents; whereas just 15% of the teachers contacted most or all parents. The parents most likely to be contacted were the parents of students with discipline problems or parents who had already shown an interest in helping their teens (most often, parents of top-performing students). Average-performing students' families were infrequently contacted by teachers.

Purnell & Gott (1985) found that both elementary and secondary teachers believed parent involvement was important, but secondary teachers felt that they did not have the time during their regular work day to involve families. Teachers indicated that if they were paid for the extra time, they would be willing to work to involve families. Secondary teachers in

this study also recognized that they needed training in how to involve families of high school students.

The growing autonomy of high school students also contributes to a natural reduction of the involvement of families in their children's education. Change in involvement, however, does not mean the elimination of all practices to inform and include parents in their teens' schools or plans for the future. Students continue to want and need their parents and other adults to help them meet their educational goals. Many families need continued guidance and direction from the school in *how* to show their support for their adolescents' education.

Several studies indicate that secondary school students benefit when their parents are involved. Monitoring homework, for example, is linked with better student efforts on homework (Keith, Reimers, Fehrman, Pottebaum, & Aubey, 1986). Involvement improves attendance (Astone and McLanahan, 1991; Epstein & Lee, 1993), and decreases rates of dropping out (Rumberger, Ghatak, Poulos, Ritter, & Dornbusch, 1990). Research confirms that many of the parenting practices important for success in elementary and middle grades remain important at the high school level. For example:

- High Expectations -- high school students are more likely to graduate or go on to college, if their parents expect them to (Delgado-Gaitan, 1988; Conklin & Dailey, 1981).

- Homework Assistance -- top-performing high school students are more likely to have parents who monitor their homework and talk with their teens about their school experiences (Ginsburg & Hanson, 1986).

- Attending School Events -- top-performing high school students report that their parents' attendance at school events demonstrates to them that their parents value education (Dornbusch & Ritter, 1988).

- Co-Managing -- top-performing high school students have parents who offer their teens many opportunities for adult guidance (Clark, 1988), keep close track of how their teens are doing in school, and assist their teens with post-high school plans (Fehrman, Keith & Reimers, 1987).

- Balancing Activities -- top-performing high school students have parents who help their teens achieve higher grades by monitoring daily activities and ensuring that their teens

are engaged in a balanced schedule of learning and leisure activities after school (Fehrman, Keith & Reimers, 1987).

These are some of the parenting practices associated with student success in high school that some families do *on their own*, usually without the assistance of the school. For all students to benefit from these and other practices, high schools must incorporate strategies that will help all (or most) families to become knowledgeable about the learning, progress, and future goals of their teens. Studies of high schools suggest that although staff believe family involvement is important, they are not reaching out to the majority of their high school students' families. The challenge becomes: How can high school educators translate their belief about the importance of family involvement into programs and practices which encourage parents to be involved in ways that are supportive to teens?

High School and Family Partnership Project

In September of 1991, researchers at the Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning joined with educators at six high schools in Maryland to learn more about:

What types of family involvement practices are occurring in high schools?

What types of practices do teachers, families, and students want to happen at their high schools?

Can new, improved, and appropriate practices for high school students and families be successfully implemented? and with what effects?

The high schools (two city, two suburban, and two rural schools) chosen to participate in the project had family involvement on their agenda as part of a state dropout prevention initiative called Maryland's Tomorrow. They were ready to take a focused look at how to implement a systematic program on this topic. To begin the High School and Family Partnership Project, the educators and researchers met together to outline their present practices to involve families. The ideas from these early meetings are reported in Epstein & Connors (1994).

The researchers proposed to survey students, teachers, and parents at the start of the project in order to gain a solid understanding of the needs and desires for family involvement in each school. Further, the surveys could help other researchers and practitioners learn more about the practices and hopes for stronger school-family-community connections in a fairly representative sample of mid-Atlantic high schools. The high school educators reviewed

questionnaires that had been used with parents and teachers in earlier studies at the elementary and middle grades (Epstein & Salinas, 1992). They contributed ideas and items for new surveys for high school teachers, parents, and students about their views, experiences, and needs for family involvement at the high school level. Their suggestions were incorporated in the *High School and Family Partnerships Surveys* (Epstein, Connors, & Salinas, 1993) which were administered in the Spring of 1992 to 9th grade students, families, and teachers in all six project schools.

The surveys were designed to help the high schools take stock of where they were starting from and determine their "opportunities for growth" in family involvement. The surveys take each respondent about twenty minutes to complete and give the school the following information from students, teachers, and families:

- attitudes and beliefs about family involvement and the school
- ratings of strong and weak practices in six types of family involvement practices
- levels of the current involvement of families and ways schools contact families
- demographic and school-specific information

Other questions particularly applicable to each group are also included. For example, on the parent questionnaire, parents are asked about their needs for information from the community, on the student questionnaire, students are asked about rules at home and their participation in family decision making.

The survey results are reported for individual schools using a form developed by the researchers: *How to Summarize Your High School's Survey Data* (Epstein, Connors, & Salinas, 1993). The six schools used their summaries to develop multi-year action plans for the High School and Family Partnership Project.

This report summarizes the preliminary, combined results from the six schools' surveys. Frequencies of selected items are presented, along with a discussion of issues and themes, and of steps that educators and researchers may take to improve family involvement at the high school level. The information illustrates how these and other high schools can work to develop over time a comprehensive and responsive set of family partnership practices at the high school level. In future publications, these data will be more formally analyzed to identify patterns and connections among variables and effects of school practices of

partnership on family involvement, and on teacher, family, and student attitudes and behaviors.

Survey Results

Characteristics of the Survey Respondents

Each of the surveys included questions about the respondents' backgrounds. The data reported below give readers a snapshot of the survey respondents and selected results.

Parents. About 420 families of ninth graders returned the surveys to the researchers by mail. The rate of return by school averaged 32% of the student sample. The majority of the surveys were completed by students' mothers, aunts or grandmothers, although 15% of the surveys were completed by fathers or grandfathers. Respondents included: 22% African American, 1% Asian American, 1% Hispanic American, 74% White, and 2% other ethnicities.

Nearly 60% of the respondents had full-time jobs, another 16% worked part-time, and 25% were unemployed at the time of the survey. Although respondents did not report marital status, they did identify "How many adults live at home, including yourself?" Seventy percent reported that two adults lived in the home, and 19% reported that one adult lived in the home. The rest (11%) had more than two adults at home. Most families had two children living at home, other families included one to nine or more children. Family respondents included 12% with less than a high school diploma, 33% with a high school diploma, 40% with some college, and 15% with a college or advanced degree.

About 52% were families of male ninth graders, and 48% of female students. According to the family reports, about 15% were excellent students (mostly As), 28% were good students, 35% were average, and 22% were fair or poor students (mostly Ds and Fs). About 40% reported that their teens were in a college prep program, and 35% were in a general education program. About 20% reported that they did not know or that their teens had not yet picked a curricular program.

About 40% were mostly or very satisfied with their teens' progress in school this year, but about 30% were mostly or very dissatisfied. About 75% reported that their ninth graders liked school some or a lot, but 15% said their teens did not like school much or at all. Just 4% predicted that their teens would not graduate from high school as things look "right now,"

with over 70% predicting that their teens would attend some type of post-secondary educational program. Three quarters of the parents reported that their teens did one hour or less of homework each night.

Students. Over 1300 ninth grade students were surveyed during a school class period, usually English. Most were 15 years old at the time of the survey in the spring of the ninth grade, though ages ranged from 14 to 19 years old. There were about an equal number of males and females.

About 11% reported that they were excellent students (mostly As), 27% were good students, 40% were average, and 22% were fair or poor students (mostly Ds and Fs). Most (78%) reported that they were doing average or above-average work in high school, though 22% reported doing poorly (e.g., receiving mostly Ds and Fs).

Students were asked to indicate how happy they were with various aspects of school life, ranging from their courses and teachers to their friends and activities. The majority of students reported being most happy with their friends (92%) and activities and sports (80%). About 78% were happy with their courses, 67% were happy with their teachers, and 65% were happy with their own work and progress. Thus, about one third of the students were *not* happy with their own work and progress in school or with their teachers.

About one quarter of the students responding reported that they held part-time jobs during the school year, and most of these students liked their jobs. A little more than half of the students reported that they were not involved in any extracurricular activities or lessons at school. However, 25% said they did volunteer work in the community and 8% were participating in a school-business partnership program.

The students' aspirations were very high. Less than 3% believed they would not graduate from high school. About 80% predicted they would attend either a 2-year or 4-year college or get an advanced degree. Only 23%, however, reported that they were in an academic program, 30% said they were in the general program, and 8% were in a vocational or technical program. About 42% did not know or had not picked a formal program in grade nine.

Although only 15% of their mothers completed college or advanced degrees, nearly 60% of the students say that their parents want them to do so. Only 6% have not talked this

over with a parent. Although the students have high aspirations, many admit that they are not learning all that they could, and many feel that their courses and their teachers are not helping them to meet their goals.

Teachers. About 150 teachers of ninth grade students completed the survey on their own time or during a staff meeting. Most of the teachers in the survey sample were highly educated and experienced -- 90% had more than five years of experience and 85% had their master's degree (or more). Teachers included 16% African American, 1% Asian American, 1% Hispanic American, 78% White, and 5% other backgrounds. There were more female teachers (58%) than males (42%). The teachers (95% of the respondents were teachers, 5% were administrators) taught 100 students per day on average. About one quarter worked on a teaching team, and 60% reported that they supervised extracurricular activities. Over three fourths reported spending about one hour or less contacting parents each week.

The families, students, and teachers represent diverse samples and provide detailed information about their attitudes, expectations, patterns of interaction and involvement at the end of grade nine -- the first year of high school. There are some limitations and some strengths in the survey samples. Neither the students nor families represent the chronically absent students who were not present on the day of the survey. There are more male teachers and more fathers responding to the family survey than is typical in surveys of elementary and middle grades schools. These and other characteristics of the families, students, and teachers and the features of the six high schools will be important variables in future analyses of these data.

Attitudes Toward School and Family Involvement

Questions on each survey asked teachers, parents, and students to respond to a series of statements reflecting their attitudes about their high schools and the importance of family involvement. Respondents rated each item on a scale from 1 to 4, from strongly disagree to strongly agree. These questions aimed to identify the similarities and differences in parent, teacher, and student beliefs and attitudes about the school and family involvement at the start of this project. We combine responses of "agree" and "strongly agree" or "disagree" and "strongly disagree" in the reported frequencies.

Five themes emerged in the survey results: general attitudes toward the school, importance of parent involvement and willingness to be involved, time and training for school-family partnership activities, frequency, amount, and type of homework assigned, and school-community relations.

Attitudes about the school. Over 90% of parents reported feeling welcome at the high school, but fewer parents (78%) rated their schools "a good place" for teachers, students, and parents. Fewer students (62%) and teachers (49%) gave their schools top ratings, suggesting room for improvement in the schools' programs, including family involvement.

Importance and willingness. Over 90% of the parents and teachers agreed that parent involvement was necessary at the high school level. These teachers also said that involvement was important for a good high school, teacher effectiveness, and student success. Most students (82%) agreed that even in high school their parents needed to be involved in their education. Most parents (80%) reported that they wanted to be more involved than they currently were, and many students (50%) want their parents to be more involved. But just 32% of the teachers felt it was their responsibility to involve families.

Time and information. In general, teachers were split on whether they had enough time to involve families -- about half felt that they had enough time and about half felt that they did not. Further, some families and students have limited time to interact with each other about school on a daily basis. Almost half of the students report that "On most days, I do not have enough time to talk to my parent about school or homework," and about one quarter of the parents also report that on most days they "do not have enough time to talk with my ninth grader about school." Nevertheless, most teachers, parents, and students say that they *do* have time for productive connections.

Two thirds of the teachers indicated that they needed more training to learn how to connect with their students' families. Teachers also realize that parents need information and training on effective ways to support their teens' education. Over 90% agreed that parents could learn ways to assist their teens *if shown how* to help. Parents concur -- many parents (70%) said they needed more information from the school to talk with their teens about school work.

Homework. Teachers reported that about 30% of their students completed "all of their homework on time," and over half of the parents feel their teens should get *more* homework. Many students (67%) report that they do about one hour or less of homework each night but almost 15% are not doing any homework, either because it is never assigned or they do not do the assigned homework.

Over 95% of all students agreed that their teachers wanted them to talk about school at home, but just half of the students reported that they liked to talk about their homework with a parent, or that they liked homework assignments that asked them to interview or talk with someone at home. Although 85% of all parents said that they talk to their teens about homework every week, 63% would like the school to conduct a workshop on "How to Help My Teen Improve Homework."

School and community relations. Survey results suggest that all locations -- rural, urban, and suburban -- need to strengthen connections with the community. Teachers want more community support for themselves and for their students' families, and parents want a safer community with better after-school and evening activities for teens. For example:

- 65% of all parents felt the community did not have good activities for teens
- 40% of all parents felt the community was not safe for children
- 35% of all teachers felt the community did not support the school

The Schools' Practices of Partnership

Teachers, parents, and students were asked to rate how well their schools were conducting a number of different types of family involvement activities. They identified the practices that were currently strong, need improvement, or need to be added at their schools. This series of questions created profiles for each school, organized according to Epstein's (1992) typology of six types of family involvement. The profiles provide a picture of the *opportunities for growth* in family and community involvement at each school.

This section describes some of the practices for each type of involvement that teachers, parents, and students agreed should be added to strengthen their schools and to assist parents and students. The project schools have begun to select and implement practices for each type of involvement. Many high schools are likely to have similar survey responses

as these, and also can begin to consider these approaches to improve their own practices of partnership.

TYPE 1: To improve parents' understanding of adolescent development, parenting skills, home conditions for learning, and the school's understanding of its families.

In all of the high schools, parents (72%), students (61%), and teachers (95%) believed that the school should start or improve practices to help parents understand more about adolescent development. In one school, respondents felt it was most important to help parents understand how teens become independent and self-confident. In another school, many parents indicated that, in addition to information on adolescent development, they would like to know more about how their teens could qualify for scholarships or loans for college.

TYPE 2: To improve communications from school to home and from home to school about school programs and student progress.

Many teachers (87%), parents (60%), and students (54%) felt that their schools should develop practices to include students in parent-teacher conferences and to improve conferences in general. Teachers, parents, and students across schools also agreed that communication practices should be improved in three ways:

- REACH MORE FAMILIES so that more families would know about school programs and student progress.
- BE MORE POSITIVE so that more families would know when students do well or improve
- LOOK AHEAD so that parents and students would receive more information from the schools to help students plan their future

TYPE 3: To improve the organization, schedules, and use of volunteers at the school and for the school, and the opportunities and schedules of audiences at school for students' events.

Most teachers (88%) clearly support the need to develop more opportunities for parents and others from the community to volunteer to assist the school and the students. However, 70% of parents reported that they were never asked to volunteer. The students'

responses to this question are more ambivalent, perhaps reflecting teens' uncertainties about whether volunteers will affect their developing autonomy and independence from parents. For example:

- Over 40% of the students indicated that a volunteer program should be started or improved at their high schools, *but* almost 40% thought it was not important to "invite my parents to become volunteers."
- 55% of the students said it would *not* be OK to "ask my parent to go on a class trip," although it was acceptable to the rest.

TYPE 4: To improve family involvement in learning activities at home, including homework, classwork, curricular-related interactions and decisions.

Teachers, parents, and students in all six schools felt that practices to assist parents in monitoring and improving student homework should be developed or improved. Over 90% of the teachers want their schools to develop practices that give parents information on how to monitor homework and how to talk with their teens about classwork. Parents agree with teachers -- 77% want ideas on how to keep track of student homework and 81% want to know how to help their teens at home on specific subjects. Teachers and parents also agree that requiring students to talk to their parents about their homework would be helpful. About half of the students said that they were willing to increase their discussions about school work with their parents if they were instructed and guided by their teachers.

High schools' efforts to increase family involvement at school and in learning activities at home must support students' developing autonomy and responsibility. We asked students to rate as "OK with me" or "not OK with me" a list of ways teachers could *ask students* to inform and involve their families in things they were learning in school. Of the eleven practices listed, at least 75% of the students would conduct these practices:

88% -- show my parent something I learned or did well
81% -- ask my parent for some ideas for a story or project
79% -- talk with my parent about current events
79% -- work with my parent to improve or keep up my grades
77% -- ask my parent to listen to me read something I wrote
77% -- ask my parent to help me study or practice for a test
76% -- bring home notes, notices, or newsletters from class
75% -- talk with my parent about a TV show

Only "inviting a parent on a class trip" was deemed "Not OK" by nearly 50%. All activities that required students to interact with a parent about school at home were "OKed" by over 60%, indicating that students are ready to do their part to inform and involve parents if teachers design work that guides this interaction.

TYPE 5: To improve family involvement in school decisions, committees, school-based management, advocacy, and other practices of participation.

Students, parents, and teachers agreed that parents should be included on committees to review school policy and high school curriculum, and on other decisionmaking groups. Many students (70%) reported that they, too, want to be included on committees that make decisions about the school. About 50% of the parents felt that the schools' practices to invite them to PTA/PTO meetings were strong; however, 40% of the parents want the school to start or improve invitations to these meetings. Over 90% of the teachers said participation by families in PTA/PTO or other similar committees needs to be developed or improved at their high schools.

TYPE 6: To improve community collaborations and resources for students, for the school, and for families.

In general, students were split in their support for inviting people from the community to talk to their class. About half (57%) of the students said the school should start or improve this practice, but 32% percent felt it was not important to do this.

Students and parents were asked to indicate the community services they felt were most important to them or their families. Both parents and students were most interested in help from the community with employment issues for teens. Most parents (over 80%) wanted information on summer and part-time jobs for teens, and over 70% wanted information on job training for teens. Students were also interested in job training (56%) and after-school jobs (65%).

Parent and Teacher Practices of Involvement

Teachers reported the practices that they think are important for them to conduct with the families of their ninth grade students. Parents reported the contacts they receive from the school and the practices that they presently conduct. Students also reported their perceptions of their parents' involvement.

Involvement at school. Few parents reported that they were involved *at the school* in activities such as volunteering, fundraising, or committee meetings. Only about 25% report that the high school contacted them at least once about how they could help with fundraising or volunteering. Students confirmed these reports. Students said their parents rarely or never went to the school for conferences (53%), meetings (62%), or to volunteer (78%).

Parents varied in their reports of the best time to come to conferences or meetings at the school. About 25% said the morning; 17% selected the afternoon; and 62% identified after dinner in the evening. About 44% also said the weekend was a good time for conferences or meetings at school. Only 3% of the families reported that they could *never* come to conferences or meetings at the school. Clearly, schools need to consider varying their schedules in order to reach all families for meetings through the year.

Contacts about students. Teachers reported that they primarily contacted parents through letters, phone calls, or conferences and meetings at school. Teachers were asked to estimate the number of families they reached with these practices. On average, teachers contacted:

- about 77% of families with LETTERS
- about 52% of families with PHONE CALLS
- about 38% of families in PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

Large numbers of parents, however, report that they are not contacted by the high school, even in common ways. For example, about 40% never were telephoned by the school; over 50% never were contacted to schedule a formal conference with a teacher; and about 67% never met informally with any of their teens' teachers. Under present practices, the lack of communication by phone or in conferences may be a good sign, as most of these interactions are about students' problems. The patterns of responses at the high school level

indicate, even more dramatically than in the earlier grades, that most families are poorly connected with their children's schools (Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Epstein & Lee, 1992).

Involvement at home. Many parents are involved in their teens' education at home, even though these practices may be "invisible" to school staff because parents are not present at school. Parents say they do many of the same practices at home that over 90% of the teachers think are important parental responsibilities.

TOP 4 PRACTICES TEACHERS THINK ARE IMPORTANT...	AND THAT PARENTS SAY THEY DO ...
Parent checks homework	85% Talk to teen about homework
Parent talks to teen about school at home	94% Talk to teen about school
Parent tells teen school is important	88% Tell teen that school is important
Parent helps teen balance activities	88% Help teen plan time for homework, chores, and other responsibilities

Most parents, however, say they need more information in order to help teens more effectively with school and personal issues. Parents were asked to indicate which of nineteen topics they were most interested in receiving more information about from the school. The topics chosen by over 60% of the parents were:

- Planning for the future -- college or work -- 83%
- Improving report card grades -- 68%
- How to help my teen develop his/her talents -- 67%
- Peer pressure in adolescence -- 64%
- How to deal with stress -- 64%
- Doing better on homework -- 63%
- Helping teens take tests -- 63%

Most parents of high school students did not make personal, face-to-face contact with their teens' teachers. Even the most basic communications such as letters and phone calls did not include all families. Large numbers of families did not attend conferences with teachers about their children. Very few families volunteered at the school.

By contrast, most parents tried to stay involved at home with their teens about school and school work. They report, however, that they lack information that would help them be more effective in their interactions at home.

Thus, we see a contradictory set of conditions. On the one hand, the lack of phone calls and conferences and other communications from the school may reflect generally *positive* conditions, because under present policies, high schools contact families mainly to discuss serious problems of students. Thus, no news is presently good news. This reality, however, ignores parents' need to know more in order to interact with and guide their teens about school and decisions for the future.

What is *Different* About High School Family Involvement?

The surveys of teachers, parents, and students were designed to elicit information to help schools understand some of the pertinent concerns and questions about involvement at the high school level. Although previous work with elementary and middle grades can guide our efforts and alert us to potential challenges, the needs of high school students, parents, and teachers are unique in many ways. Programs of school-family-community partnerships in high schools need to consider:

- the unique needs of adolescents, such as the need for greater autonomy and responsibility, and the need to develop individual skills and talents,
- the unique needs of families, such as more working parents, living greater distances from high schools, and the need to learn about a more complex school organization, and
- the unique needs of high school teachers, such as having greater numbers of students to teach, more specialized training, and more families to involve.

Important questions emerge at the high school level about how these issues affect the types of practices to involve families and the methods of implementation. The following section discusses survey results that inform these questions by identifying key features of good programs of partnership.

How can stronger family-school-community connections help students develop a healthy sense of their own responsibility, independence, and autonomy?

Students have responsibilities in school-family-community partnerships. To mobilize high school students' participation and support for family involvement, practices need to respect and support the student's developing independence while ensuring that students understand the responsibilities associated with increased independence. Few students promptly deliver notices home or complete all of their homework, according to both student and teacher reports. Only 23% of the students report that it is "just like me" to promptly deliver notices home from school. Most students admit that they could improve their responsibilities in school and family connections.

Some students are not sure of the school's goals for them or their ability to have a strong role in school life. About 71% of the students reported that they were "learning as much as they can this year," leaving more than one fourth who recognize they could do better in school. About 63% "trust the school to do its best" for them, indicating that over one third of the students feel that the school could be working harder to assist them in meeting their educational goals.

Most high school students would like more opportunities to have their voices heard in school decisions. Over half report that they do not have a "lot of say" in school decisions. They also want to be included in their own learning and progress. Over 70% would like to be included in parent-teacher conferences.

The student's role as mediator in family-school connections is important, and often underestimated and underutilized (Montandon & Perrenoud, 1987). In order to support and reinforce students' roles in family-school connections and in their own learning, students need to hear and see evidence that their parents and teachers are working with them to support their education and future goals. And, high school students need ample opportunities to participate in school decisions that affect them.

Students want independence but continue to need adult guidance. A series of questions on the student survey attempted to elicit a picture of the students' views of themselves, how they make decisions, and who assists them in decision making. The majority (75%) of the students indicated that they like to make their own decisions, with about half (51%) making most of these decisions without their parents' help. However, many students

also feel that they need guidance. About 47% report that they "usually need someone to tell them what to do," and 54% report that they "feel lost keeping busy on their own."

Most students (79%) report that their families monitor where they are and keep track of how they are doing in school. There is greater variation in who makes important rules for teens and how those rules are made. The survey of students asked several questions about family rules and who -- the parent, the teen, or parent and teen together -- makes decisions about a number of personal and educational rules. Students experience different levels of parental authority and guidance, but on average some interesting patterns emerged.

- More than half reported that their ***parents*** make the rules about the time to be in on school nights; and if they can smoke (59%), drink (58%), or use drugs (67%).
- More than half reported that they make decisions alone about their high school courses (73%); whether to go to college (59%); how to spend their own money (83%); how to dress (86%) or wear their hair (89%); the friends they have (63%); the age to go steady (62%); and whether to go to church or temple (60%).
- There were no decisions that more than half of the students said they decided together with their parents, but over 40% said that they ***cooperatively decided*** the time to be in on weekends (45%); doing chores at home (40%); and when they will learn to drive (49%).

The patterns of authority and autonomy will be studied in detail in later analyses. The general patterns of responses suggest that most ninth graders feel that they have a considerable amount of say in decisions that affect them at home. They recognize that their parents have set rules that support laws about teens' use of drugs and alcohol. Cooperative decisions were made more often on issues that include the interests of both parents and students, like learning to drive the family car, or doing chores at home that help the family.

It was surprising to us that there were not more topics in which parents and students "decided together," particularly about issues that affect the students' and families' futures, such as going to college and choosing high school courses. It may be that students' reports on these questions reflect decisions made in previous discussions with parents. Or, it may be that families need more information about adolescence in order to establish more collaborative patterns of interactions for making decisions about important rules and guidelines that affect their teens' success in school and future plans.

Student autonomy develops best in a caring and supportive environment. About 35% of the students indicated that they felt their teachers did not care about them, and about 25% reported that they did not know at least one adult in the school whom they "could go to for help on almost anything." They would like the school to acknowledge them as active and willing partners in school-family-community connections by, for example, including students in conferences and appointing them to school committees. Some teens expressed strong feelings in the open-ended section of the survey about wanting special attention and challenges from teachers and parents for all students, not just for those who are doing well. Teens also expressed the desire for teachers to discuss problem behavior with the student *before* calling the parent. Yet, many cautioned the school not to wait too long to call the parent, so that they could benefit from the assistance of the family before it is too late to solve academic or behavioral problems. Improving school-family-community partnerships may help students to see that there are several adults in their lives who care about them, will listen to their concerns and suggestions, and are available to assist them if needed.

Parents are mainly positive about their teens. About 72% of the parents note that their teens liked to make decisions, and 69% say the teen can be trusted. Over half think their teens will not have difficulties in the "real world." Yet 68% realize that at least some of the time the teens need to be told what to do. Most parents say their teens are developing well -- on the right track.

Most students recognize that their parents keep track of them at school and at home (80%), and 94% of the parents in this sample say they do so. Almost 95% of the students say their parents reinforce "how important school is for my future." Students recognize and report the continuing parenting roles and actions, and parents report their continued interest in and rearing of their teens. Yet, the parenting activities may not be very deep, and may not touch upon issues that are central to adolescence, success in school, or plans for the future.

What do high school teachers need from other school staff and families in order to increase their efforts to build strong family-school-community partnerships?

Increase the support for teachers' efforts to involve families: Although there was strong agreement by about 81% of the teachers about the importance of family involvement, many teachers expressed concerns about needing time, training, and information about families' and students' needs to involve families effectively.

Teachers believe that they are more supportive of school-family partnerships than are their colleagues and parents, but less supportive than their principal:

- 53% said the **principal** strongly supported family involvement
- 33% said **they personally** strongly supported family involvement
- 15% said **other teachers at the school** strongly supported family involvement
- 3% said **parents** strongly supported family involvement

The responses from high school teachers about others' support for involvement differ from those of elementary and middle grades teachers, who more often report that they *and* their principals strongly favor involving families (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). As subject specialists, high school teachers may be guided more by the department heads in their practices of partnerships than by the principal, unless the school undertakes a significant restructuring effort. Most department leaders are not aware of or prepared to guide their teachers in new directions for family involvement, resulting in variability among high school teachers in their attitudes and practices of partnership. Also, high school teachers work relatively independently, and may not know how their colleagues in their own or other departments feel about involving parents. This could change if the topic is addressed as part of curricular reform across subjects.

In contrast, *like* elementary and middle grades teachers, very few high school teachers believe that parents strongly support involvement. At all levels of schooling, teachers' views about parents do not reflect parents' reports about their own strong support for involvement. At all levels of schooling, teachers underestimate parents efforts to be involved in their children's education, and their desire to be better informed, particularly about how to assist their teens at home.

Convince teachers that parents do want to be more involved. Teachers expressed concerns about parent apathy and lack of interest in the school. Their beliefs about parents are countered by (a) their own wishes that parents would become more involved, (b) parents' concerns for their children's education and desire for more information so they could be more involved in their teens' lives; and (c) students' wishes that their parents were more involved. Parents want more conferences, better communications with teachers, more challenging courses and homework for children, and greater responsibility by their teens in delivering messages and newsletters home. As one parent wrote, they could "get involved -- if we knew

how!" Another parent said, "Everyone needs to work together. Stop blaming each other about why the kids are the way they are."

Teachers, parents, and students need to share their concerns and interests in order to improve the climate for partnership activities. Although teachers do not think parents strongly support family involvement or want to be more involved, parents indicate a strong willingness to be more involved and would like more communications and other positive information about their teens' schools and academic progress. The parents' surveys show that most feel pretty good about their own high school and its goals, although they would like the school to work harder to involve them. For example:

- 85% agree that their high school is a good school
- 78% agree that "this high school is a good place for students and for parents"
- 75% agree that the school and family have the same goals for students
- 60% agree that the school works hard to involve parents, but
- 84% want to be more involved in their teens' education

What do the families of high school students need from the school in order to participate more effectively in school-family-community partnerships?

Create flexible practices which fit into today's busy lifestyles. Both high school students and parents have limited time on a daily basis to discuss school work. About one quarter of the students work part-time during the school year; about one quarter participate in extra-curricular activities, and an equal number participate in out-of-school activities, though some of these may be the same students. About three fourths of the parents work full or part time. Families will need flexible schedules, advanced notices, or extended deadlines to complete interactive homework with their teens, to attend meetings or conferences at school, or to volunteer to assist the school or attend a school event. The facts of family life suggest that activities to involve families at school or at home must be well organized and clearly important to student success so that limited time is well spent. Specific activities need to be designed to *re*-energize the involvement of high school students and families with the school.

Capture interest from the beginning. Most students want their families to be better informed and available to help them in appropriate ways to meet their educational and personal goals. Although some students say that they are doing well in school and their

parents are already involved, most students (nearly 70%) say the school needs to start or improve many practices that give their parents more information about their classes, and greater participation in their education.

Beginning the transition to high school, schools could capture the interest and desire of eighth grade students and families to know more about the high school and the importance of continued family involvement. Fewer than half of these students (41%) visited their future high schools or went to some classes when they were in the eighth grade. Few parents (22%) visited the high schools before their teens entered in ninth grade, and over 40% did not receive good information about the high school program when their children were in eighth grade. However, some students (56%) reported that, *on their own*, their families helped their teens make the transition to high school. And, 70% of the students reported that they talked *on their own* to their families about tenth grade courses.

Summary. The role of the student is central to the development of stronger and more comprehensive practices in school-family-community partnerships at the high school level. Teachers and parents need to take a second look at many traditional practices, e g , parent-teacher conferences, which may be carry-overs from the younger grades, to see if these practices can be redesigned to give students' more responsibility for their own learning and progress. Similarly, other practices need to be designed that help students determine whether and how school-family-community partnerships help them reach their own personal and educational goals.

In all six high schools in the project, ninth grade students, parents, and teachers expressed common goals of good communication, shared information, and success for students. Creating strong and comprehensive school-family partnerships, at any level of schooling, is not "overnight magic" but a deliberate and thoughtful process of program development for three to five years. The six high schools in this project will be working to show incremental change through more responsive and diverse activities to inform and involve families and community members at school, at home, and in the community, in the education of adolescents.

Next Steps for the High School-Family Partnership Project

Although there are serious challenges to creating strong family-school-community partnerships at the high school, the schools in this project have started to make real progress in planning and implementing more responsive programs. After one year, the Action Teams in the schools, including teachers, parents, and students, came together to share their experiences and ideas (Epstein & Connors, 1994). While their survey results were being analyzed and summarized, each school implemented some new or improved practices to inform and involve ninth grade students and families. Reported below are some of the practices of each of the six major types of involvement that were implemented successfully during the 1992-93 school year.

TYPE 1: Parenting and setting home conditions for learning and development

Positive Discipline Workshop -- A guidance counselor in one school conducted a 5-session workshop series. Parents discussed teen behavior and appropriate parenting approaches. The Assistant Principal also asked families of students referred to the office to help to choose and to reinforce school-imposed consequences to correct students' negative behaviors.

TYPE 2: Communications about school programs and student progress

Friendly Phone Calls were made in one school to encourage all 9th grade families to attend Back-to School Night.

Survival Packets were given to each 9th grade parent that included "refrigerator pages" with important telephone numbers, school meeting dates, and school policies. Copies were left in the guidance office for families who transferred to the school mid-year.

High School Orientations for 8th grade students and families were led by high school students who served as guides and small group discussion leaders.

Parent Dinner involved families in one school in cooperative learning activities so that parents could experience some of the learning strategies used with students.

TYPE 3: Volunteers and audiences at the school

Volunteer Phone Callers were used in one school to increase positive contacts between family members and a school-based person. Each staff or parent volunteer called up to ten 9th grade families each month to inform them of upcoming events and answer any questions.

TYPE 4: Learning activities at home

Family Talk -- As part of a special program for black males in one of the schools, students were asked to talk with a family member about what the parent liked most about the student. Also, students worked on their own "ten-year plans" and were asked to discuss their goals with a family member.

TYPE 5: Decision making and leadership

Bring One More to the Parent Advisory Committee Meetings. Parents in one school were personally invited to meetings and "veteran" parents were asked to bring a new parent to the next meeting.

TYPE 6: Collaborating with the community

Gold Cards allow students to earn discounts at local businesses for progress in academics and attendance.

NICE -- Neighbors Involved in the Community of Edgewood -- held a meeting for families, students, and community members on the risk factors related to substance abuse and identified positive adult role models in the community for students.

Next Steps ... for Other High Schools

If your high school is ready to address the need for better communication with families, this report should help you understand some basic patterns:

- High school teachers believe involvement is important, but have not organized practices to communicate important information to families;

- Parents of high school students want to obtain and share information about their teens, their education, and their futures,

- High school students want their parents to be knowledgeable partners with their schools.

Even if your school is unable to conduct surveys of teachers, parents, and students, you do not have to wait to get started. Our survey results identified many consistent patterns and themes across the urban, rural, and suburban high schools in this project. Your high school can join the national agenda to improve partnerships with families by following these steps:

STEP ONE: Create an Action Team for School and Family Partnerships.

We have found in our work with the high schools, and previously at other levels of schooling, that the team approach is an effective way to focus peoples' energies and attention on an issue, while creating a supportive environment for implementing new ideas. An Action Team for School-Family-Community Partnerships should be created and charged with making the time, getting the training, and identifying and implementing the practices most needed at your school.

STEP TWO: Secure Funds to Support the Development of Your Program of Partnership.

Your Action Team for School-Family-Community Partnerships will be more effective if it is supported by at least a small stipend (our schools receive $500 per semester for three to five years) for time needed to plan, implement and revise new or improved practices. Principals' discretionary funds, PTA/PTO donations, business partners, or community foundations often have small sums of money available for innovative projects. Federal, state, and local program funds also may contribute substantial support for schools to develop programs of partnership including staff development, site facilitators, and demonstration grants.

STEP THREE: Select Practices to Start to Improve the School's Connections with ALL Families and with the Community.

The survey results provided each high school in this project with "profiles" of the practices that teachers, parents, and students think should be added or improved to strengthen partnerships. In addition to the examples in the text, the sample practices that schools added in the first year of the project, and other ideas in Epstein & Connors (1994), the following are some basic practices that emerged from discussions with the project high schools about their survey data that *any high school* might consider to begin partnerships that will strengthen the school, families, and student development.

Any High School Can....

Type 1 Parenting	Develop a lasting set of workshops on key issues in adolescent development. This could be a video taped series, developed with the help of a local cable company, community or technical college, or the high school's media department. The guidance office could take leadership for these activities, working with the Action Team, perhaps using the tapes as a forum for a parent workshop series. The tapes can be made available to families through the school, the library, or for free at local video stores on a check-out basis.
Type 2 Communicating	Include students in parent-teacher conferences. Develop one-page guidelines for parents and teens to prepare for the conference. The guidelines would help parents and teens identify common concerns, interests, and talents to discuss with teachers during the conference. The conference could also focus on students' goals and how the teacher and parent could better assist the student.
Type 3 Volunteering	One member of the Action Team or a parent and teacher as co-chairs could coordinate parent and community volunteers with school and teacher needs for help. Encourage many to participate by allowing work to be done at home or at school, on the weekends, or before/after regular school hours. Encourage teachers to be creative in their requests for assistance so that the many skills and interests of parents and community members can be tapped.
Type 4 Learning at Home	Design interactive homework that requires students to talk to someone at home about something interesting that they are learning in class or about important school decisions. The homework activity is the student's responsibility but a parent or other family or community member is used as a *reference source* or *audience* for the student. This enables students to share ideas at the same time that families are informed about the students' curricula and learning activities.
Type 5 Decision Making	Invite parents and students to become members of school committees or councils to review curriculum or specific school policies. In order to encourage diverse representation, ask a more experienced parent or student leader to be a "buddy" to a less experienced parent or student.
Type 6 Collaborating with Community	Develop a community resource directory, perhaps in cooperation with the school nurse, or with a member of the Chamber of Commerce or other group, which gives parents and students information on community agencies that can help with health issues, job training and summer or part-time employment for teens, and other areas of need for families and students.

Conclusion

Seven main conclusions emerge from the descriptive analyses of the data collected from the high schools in this project:

There is a shared vision of partnership. The surveys reveal that parents, students, and teachers share a belief about the importance of family involvement at the high school level. More importantly, they have a common vision of a high school that works in partnership with families to inform and involve them in the school and in the teen's education at home.

Urban, suburban, and rural high schools are remarkably similar in their goals for partnership. Overwhelming numbers of parents, teachers, and students in this sample recognize the need for better practices of partnership. Most of the activities that parents, students and teachers would like their schools to begin or improve were similar for schools in city, suburban, and rural locations. High school students, teachers, and families recognize their schools' strengths and weaknesses. They report that there are many practices that need to be added or improved in order to reach and involve all families. Regardless of location, there is high agreement that parents, teachers, and students need to allot time and need to build "know how" in order to communicate more effectively with each other. Nevertheless, generally positive attitudes about the schools provide an important base on which to build programs of partnership at each school.

The differences across locations were more in the urgency of need to solve certain problems than in the presence the problem. For example, the lack of community recreational opportunities for students was more severe in one rural location than in other sites, although all schools cited the need for increased community involvement. As another example, city schools had more severe problems to solve about the sale of drugs in or near the schools than in the other locations, although all schools indicated some drug problems. Also, the city schools were larger and will require different strategies to reach all families with the practices that parents request in all locations. The students in the city schools start with more academic problems than students in other locations. Positive communications requested by teachers, parents, and students in all schools will need to recognize student progress made from different starting points.

Families need and want better information about high schools and about their teens' programs. It is clear that many parents try to remain involved and supportive of their teens' education at home, but the schools are not fully aware of parents' efforts, in part because the schools focus on the fact that so few parents are involved at school.

Parents report that they are trying to do the very practices at home that teachers say are important for parents to do. They recognize that they need more information from the school and community about adolescent development and about their teens' learning and progress in order to conduct these practices effectively and to be of greater assistance to their teens and the schools.

Because they are unfamiliar with family actions and goals, the schools have not provided most families with the information that they need to be effective in their efforts to remain involved at home. Nor have schools created the productive programs or compelling activities that would bring families to the schools as volunteers, audiences, or decision makers. The project high schools have committed to correcting these conditions.

Involvement in high school should begin with activities in the middle grades to prepare students and their families for the transition to high school. The data suggest that many parents did not get good information about the high school or the importance of continued involvement while the students were in eighth grade. Fewer than one fourth of the families visited the high school prior to the transition, and fewer than half the students did. It is important for high schools to recognize the importance of the time of transition for maintaining family involvement. Importantly, the educators in the project high schools decided to begin their work by adding practices to inform and involve the families of the incoming ninth graders.

Students need and want to be part of the partnership. Most students want their families more involved as knowledgeable partners, and they are willing to conduct interactions with their families about their homework and about important decisions. High school students' support for new practices of partnership between schools and families will be tempered by their needs, at this age, for increasing autonomy. Students' responses may also reflect a realistic assessment of their families' and their own time to participate. But, students' support also will be affected by the quality of the design of partnership activities, how these are explained to the students, and how students are included in the partnerships.

If practices are well designed and implemented, they should fulfill parents' need for information, teachers' need for good communication and support from home, *and* students' growing autonomy. That is, good practices of partnership (such as including students in parent-teacher conferences, encouraging students to show and share their work at home, involving students on school committees) respond both to parents' needs to continue guiding and monitoring their children and students' needs to increase their responsibilities and abilities.

Some students and some families are particularly isolated from their schools and communities, and disconnected from each other. The surveys of students suggest that about 25% of the students feel unattached to their high schools or any teachers. Nearly 30% of the parents report their ninth graders did not get off to a good start at the high school. Over 25% of the families and students say they are "not learning as much as they could this year" -- a combination of school and personal investments. The "bottom quarter" of a high school class is a large group with important academic and social problems that must be addressed in innovative ways by high schools, including better connections with families.

High schools can develop and implement more comprehensive programs to inform and involve families across the grades. The high school Action Teams in our project have begun to move forward to use the opportunities for growth identified in their surveys of teachers, parents, and students to develop action plans for the next two years. After starting with attention to practices to inform and involve the families of the incoming ninth graders, they worked in the 1993-94 school year to include practices to expand partnerships with 10th grade students and families. By the end of the project in 1995, we expect these schools will have designed or selected and implemented strategies to involve families of 9th through 12th grade students in the six types of involvement.

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